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## CUNNINGHAM'S GROWTH OF ENGLISH INDUSTRY.<sup>1</sup>

ANY one who is acquainted with recent English political economy knows that for the last decade Mr. Cunningham has been the sturdy and even aggressive critic of the dominant abstract school, the advocate of a more historical or "empirical" study of social phenomena. In the years between the death of Cliffe Leslie and the appearance of Dr. Ingram's *History*, he stood almost alone in the English academic world in his open antagonism to the deductive method. And he did not confine himself to mere criticism: his *Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (1882) was the first attempt that had been made to trace the whole course of English economic development; while his monograph on *Usury* (1884), now unfortunately out of print, was the first serious discussion in England of one of the most important of mediæval conceptions. To the revival of economic studies which is now showing itself in England, Mr. Cunningham, both as a teacher at Cambridge and also through his books, has contributed in no small measure. To him, perhaps, more than to any one else is it due that the conception of the "relativity" of economic doctrine is at last beginning to find a place in current discussions.

The substantial volume now before us is the result of successive recastings and accretions incident to the preparation of a second edition of the book published nine years ago. The changes are so great that the work is practically a new one; and it presents itself as the first instalment of a great treatise, which will cover in a thorough and worthy fashion the whole field of English economic evolution. How sorely such a treatise is needed it is unnecessary to say; and it is to be hoped that Mr. Cunningham's patience will not flag before he has brought his work down to our own days.

One has but to turn over the pages of this first volume to be struck by the author's breadth of treatment. He attempts, and that with great success, to illustrate by his own example one of the main principles of the historical school, the interaction of social forces. Each of the books into which the volume is divided opens with a sketch of the political and social conditions of a given period; and after tracing the course of industrial and commercial affairs, each closes with an account

<sup>1</sup> *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce, during the Early and Middle Ages.* By William Cunningham, D.D. Cambridge: at the University Press, 1890. — 626 pp.

of contemporary changes in economic opinion. The author is admirably fitted for the task by his own many-sidedness ; and for dealing with the middle ages in particular, by his strong interest in mediæval theology and ecclesiology. Economists have been made out of classical tutors, mathematicians, lawyers and men of business ; it is an agreeable change when one is made out of a theologian and casuist. I use the last term, it may not be amiss to add, in its original sense. The book displays, moreover, an extraordinarily extensive reading in all the modern literature that can in any way throw light on the subject, as well as a considerable study of original authorities, the fruits of which are to be found in the welcome appendix of hitherto unprinted documents. And Mr. Cunningham is not overcome by his wealth of learning ; he handles it easily, and every page is bright with fresh suggestion. Whether we agree with him or not, his book is eminently one to make us think. I never go back to a page of Mr. Cunningham's writing without finding in it a new idea.

The only way to give an adequate notion of the book would be to furnish an abstract of its contents, together with a running commentary ; but for this the volume is too full and my space too limited. If this review, therefore, confines itself chiefly to adverse criticism, the reason is, not that this will give at all a fair impression of the character of the treatise, but rather because it may thus be possible, in a comparatively narrow compass, to advance the discussion of a few of the important points still at issue. But before turning to this less agreeable duty, let me call attention to some of those parts of the volume which display Mr. Cunningham's strength. First and foremost stand all the sections occupied with the explanation of mediæval economic doctrine. We cannot be too thankful for these ; for although Mr. Cunningham had been anticipated by a few pregnant pages of Knies, yet ordinary English students do not read Knies ; and Mr. Cunningham brings to his exposition a sympathy for mediæval modes of thought in ethics and theology which is hardly to be found in his master. Then again the sections on commerce are admirably complete ; and a distinct addition to knowledge is made by the proof that mercantilism can be traced as far back as the reign of Richard II. The common idea of historical essayists is, of course, that the policy of every government down to the time of Adam Smith was identical, and always equally mistaken. Readers, indeed, of Ochenkowski's useful little book were aware that the ideas which governed, *e.g.*, the early legislation as to currency, were essentially different from those of the seventeenth century. What remained was to discover the point of transition ; and this Mr. Cunningham has now done. I must not forget to add that our author shows excellently well the vast importance of the action of Parliament, and especially

of the legislation of Edward I, in creating a national economy out of a network of communal economies. Another direction also in which Mr. Cunningham has done much-needed service is in criticising the theory, popularized by socialistic literature and now not infrequently accepted as a fact, that the fifteenth century was "the golden age of the English laborer." This was first enunciated by the late Professor Thorold Rogers; and, like many other of his utterances, it witnesses to his pleasure in strong effects of light and shade. Mr. Cunningham now shows that it rests altogether on the assumption that employment was regular — an assumption which there is much to disprove.

And now, with an easier conscience, I may turn to questioning. Mr. Cunningham is not content to begin his account of English society with the eleventh century, from which point we have abundant evidence; he essays the more difficult task of describing the condition of the English at the date of their conquest of Britain, and the nature of the changes which took place in succeeding centuries. When he wrote his earlier sketch, English historical students were still under the spell of Maurer and Nasse and Maine: they all believed devoutly in the primitive Teutonic freeman and the mark, or free village community. Since then, however, Mr. Seebohm has arisen; and those who, like Mr. Cunningham, cling to the original free community feel it necessary to assume the defensive (pages 102-108). Accordingly Mr. Cunningham takes up this position: *assuming* that there were originally free communities, it is possible to point out various ways in which they *may conceivably* have been degraded into manors. He seems, moreover, to suppose that Maurer's authority may still be accepted so far as Germany is concerned, since he speaks of the "temptation to adopt for England what has been *worked out* for Germany" (page 45, note). I will not discuss the arguments he adduces to show the probability of a manorial development, though I venture to think they are somewhat unsubstantial. What I want to point out is, that since the appearance of Fustel de Coulanges' *Recherches* in 1885, it is no longer possible to believe that Maurer has proved his case even so far as Germany is concerned. That changes the scientific situation. Looking at the mass of evidence presented for the whole of western Europe by Coulanges and Mr. Seebohm, antecedent probability is now on the side of those who maintain a continuity of the Roman agricultural system. The burden of proof lies henceforth on those who believe in the free village community. Those who think that from the earliest of the middle ages the bulk of the rural population were in a dependent or semi-servile condition can show ground enough for their conviction; what those who are not convinced by this evidence have to do is to present, not a hypothetical construction, but some definite evidence. Accordingly I cannot help thinking that

the greater part of Book I is of a transitional character ; and that in ten years' time, if not before, Mr. Cunningham may see his way to re-writing it. Much that he tells us in it of *extensive* and *intensive* culture and the like is of value ; but even the undisputed facts will of necessity assume a different appearance when looked at from another point of view. And Mr. Cunningham himself seems to recognize that the current of investigation is setting in a different direction, to judge from a sentence which occurs towards the end of the volume and which was probably written later than Book I : "The doctrine which traces common rights back to a time of primitive freedom seems every day to be becoming less tenable" (page 474).

Compared with this, all other objections to Mr. Cunningham's treatment of his theme are altogether secondary. And yet it may be worth while to dwell upon one or two additional points. Brentano, it is very well known, gave an impressive account of the struggle which, as he supposed, took place in England between the craft guilds and the old burghers, united in merchant guilds. For years he was servilely followed by every one who wrote upon the subject ; with the not unnatural consequence that when Professor Ochenkowski, Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Gross came themselves to examine the evidence, they seized upon Brentano's obvious exaggerations and scouted his whole teaching. The present writer ventured to point out that there was at any rate some reason for believing that the relations between merchant and craft guilds even in England were not altogether happy. As to this I may have an opportunity of saying something in a future number of the *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*. Here it will be enough to criticise the explanation which Mr. Cunningham makes (pages 176-182) of the undoubted fact that in certain towns the weavers were oppressed. He declares (1) that "there was a large immigration of artisans which began soon after the conquest" ; (2) that the exceptional position of these foreigners, who "were not at scot and lot with the other inhabitants," sufficiently explains any disabilities to which the weavers (whom he supposes to have all been foreigners, or of foreign descent) were subjected. This second contention is sufficiently improbable ; but let us here content ourselves with asking the prior question : what are the grounds for holding that there was a large immigration of craftsmen ?

If we look at the various pieces of evidence which Mr. Cunningham adduces, it will be plain, I think, that he has put his theory into them, instead of getting it out of them. First, as to artisans in general. "Domesday Book gives us ample evidence as to the existence of artisans of French or foreign birth" ; and we are referred to the cases of Shrewsbury, Norwich and Cambridge. But in the Shrewsbury and Norwich cases the entry is "*Francigenae burgenses*," and in Cambridge

it is simply "*Francigenae*." Of course these may have been craftsmen, but there is no proof that they were ; and there are some reasons for thinking they were not. It may be noticed that Mr. Gross, whose authority Mr. Cunningham justly regards as very high, seems to find no difficulty in connecting them with trade and in associating them with the rise of the guild merchant.<sup>1</sup> As to *weavers* in particular, Mr. Cunningham tells us that a number of Flemings, driven by inundations in their own country, came to England under the protection of Queen Matilda ; that they did not get on well with their English neighbors in the places where they settled ; and that Henry I accordingly transported them to Pembrokeshire. His authority is Giraldus Cambrensis, who does certainly say of these Flemings that they were "*gens lanificiis usitatissima*." But let us look at the contest. The whole passage is as follows :

Erat autem gens haec originem a Flandria ducens, ab Anglorum rege Henrico primo ad hos fines inhabitandum transmissa. Gens fortis et robusta, continuoque belli conflictu gens Kambrensis inimicissima ; gens, inquam, lanificiis gens mercimoniis usitatissima, quocunque labore sive periculo terra marique lucrum quaerere gens pervalida : *vicissim loco et tempore nunc ad aratrum nunc ad arma gens promptissima*. [Book I, chap. xi.]

Now, looking at this passage without prepossessions, I think one would remark, first, that the whole passage is rhetorical, and that no very great stress can be laid on any one word of it ; secondly, that Giraldus is chiefly bent on drawing a contrast between the thrifty Fleming and the restless unpractical Welshman (see the references under *Cambrenses* in the index of the last volume) ; and thirdly, that the general impression he wishes to give is that these Flemings were able to turn their hands to anything. Certainly it does not seem that the phrase of Giraldus is sufficient to support the supposition that these Flemings included among them a considerable number of craftsmen with whom weaving was the main occupation. We never hear afterwards of any woollen manufactures in that district ; which makes it seem likely that there never were any. And it may be remarked finally that even if there had been some weavers among them, they were too far away from the rest of England to be able to exercise much influence over the growth of its manufactures. But whatever may be our opinion as to this, it would certainly seem unsafe to build upon Giraldus' one word any very positive conclusion, especially when this conclusion lands one in a position which is hardly reconcilable with some of the larger facts of English social history. Thus this idea that there was a great swarming-over of craftsmen to England soon after the conquest leads Mr. Cunningham to treat of the craft guilds long before he touches the merchant guilds. But the move-

<sup>1</sup> *Gild Merchant*, vol. i, p. 4 and note 3.

ment which brought about the creation of merchant associations certainly preceded by more than half a century that which led to associations of crafts.

This will be a convenient place to make a correction in Mr. Cunningham's account of some of the later stages of the history of the craft guilds. Professor Thorold Rogers was fond of asserting in the most vigorous language that the scoundrelly ministers of Edward VI, by confiscating the funds of the craft guilds, "which were the friendly societies of the middle ages," did much to produce the destitution which had to be remedied by the poor law. When a great authority makes an assertion over and over again with an air of absolute certainty, even his most cautious readers get to believe that "there must be something in it." This is curiously illustrated by the book before us; for Mr. Cunningham was bold enough, years ago, to challenge some of Professor Rogers' pet beliefs, and was answered with unmeasured oburgation. Even in this instance, Mr. Cunningham has looked up the statute of Edward VI, and has found that "corporations, guilds, fraternities, companies and fellowships of mysteries or crafts" were expressly exempted from confiscation. This ought, one would have thought, to have settled the matter; for however violent may have been the government of Edward VI, it was not in the habit of openly setting statutes at defiance. But in spite of this the pressure of Mr. Rogers' authoritative dictum was too great to be resisted, and Mr. Cunningham yields himself a prey. I may speak the more freely on this point, because I have been guilty of the same weakness. Notwithstanding the exemption in the act, Mr. Cunningham "doubts whether any large number of craft guilds actually survived"; he concludes that "generally speaking, they received their death blow in 1547," and does not hesitate to speak of them as "abolished" (page 465 and note) and "destroyed." He seeks to confirm this conclusion with some independent arguments:

(1) The act 2 and 3 Ed. VI, c. 15, § 3, "provided that artisans might work where they pleased . . . and the exclusive privileges of local craft guilds were thus set aside." But the act only applied to laborers in the *building trades*; and even this was repealed next year (3 and 4 Ed. VI, c. 20).

(2) He remarks in a footnote that wardens of guilds were not recognized for public duties after 1547 (the case of the London grocers in 1 Mary being exceptional); and he implies that this proves the destruction of the guild system. Now it was undoubtedly the policy of the Tudor government to bring the companies more closely under the supervision of the central authority, acting through the justices of the peace; but there is no evidence that the act of 1547 marked any very important step in that direction. Besides the wardens of the grocers, the masters

and wardens of the "company of haberdashers," with the assistance of "one of the company of the cappers and another of the makers of hats" were given power to search premises by 8 Eliz. c. 11, § 3; and doubtless many similar cases could easily be found.

(3) The survival of guilds in Preston and Coventry is spoken of as exceptional. But without going outside the statute book we find the "company and occupation of worsted-makers within the city of Norwich" in 5 Eliz. c. 4, § 27; and in 8 Eliz. c. 7, we learn that at Shrewsbury "there hath been time out of mind of man, and yet is, a company, fraternity or guild of the art and mysterie of drapers, which said company . . . hath been by a great time lawfully incorporated and made a body politic."

(4) And finally, the continuance of the London guilds is explained on the ground that "they could not be dissolved unless provision was made for a new constitution for the government of the city." But the same argument would apply to some other places; an obvious example is York.<sup>1</sup>

Having thus shown that the additional arguments lend no weight to the main contention, let us look again at the act (1 Ed. VI, c. 14) and see what really took place. The act expressly says that out of the revenues of corporations, *etc.*, of mysteries or crafts, the king shall have vested in him *as rent charges* all sums of money hitherto payable "toward the finding, maintenance or sustentation of any priest, of any anniversary or obit, lamplight or lights or other like thing." The commissioners appointed by the government thereupon drew up a statement of the revenues of such guilds or fraternities and of the amount hitherto spent for the specified purposes, which amount they declared to be henceforward vested in the king. Thus in the case of the "Fraternity of St. John Baptist within the parish church of S. Ewens," Bristol, which was "a company of the craft of tailors," the commissioners reported that upon a chaplain and certain obits £5 10s. 4d. were annually spent, "whereunto the King's majesty is entitled as a rent charge out of the lands to the said fraternity belonging."<sup>2</sup> Precisely the same thing took place in London; the only difference was that the London companies were able, by paying lump sums down, to buy off the rent charges cheaply. As Strype says: "This was a great blow to the corporations of London; nor was there any other way for them but to purchase and buy off these rent charges, and get as good pennyworths as they could of the King."<sup>3</sup>

The conclusion of the whole matter then is this: there is no reason to believe that the act of Edward VI led to the disappearance of the

<sup>1</sup> Stubbs, Constitutional History, III, § 488. Cf. Newcastle, in Gross, II, 383.

<sup>2</sup> Transactions, Bristol and Gloucester Archæological Society, vol. viii.

<sup>3</sup> The details of the transaction will be found in the first volume of Herbert.



guilds ; there was absolutely no breach in continuity ; and the lessening importance of the incorporations of trades in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was due primarily to economic causes, especially the appearance of new industries and the extension of " domestic " manufactures. The seizure of such portions of their revenue as were devoted to certain religious purposes doubtless in some measure diminished their importance ; but it no more necessarily led to their disappearance than the similar legislation with regard to *confréries* in France in the sixteenth century led to the disappearance of the *jurandes*.<sup>1</sup>

While we are speaking of Mr. Rogers' influence upon our author, we may notice another trace of it in his account of the peasant rising of 1381. Mr. Rogers explained that rising as due to an attempt on the part of the lords of land to overturn the very general arrangement by which labor services were commuted for money payments. Mr. Cunningham sees that there were other reasons besides this, and refrains from definitely asserting that such an attempt was ever made ; for like Mr. Rogers he can adduce no evidence for it. But yet he cannot help—quite unnecessarily, as it seems to me—stating it as a possibility. " There might be a more bitter sense of wrong in the case of those who . . . paid a money commutation for the whole or for any part of the actual services . . . if an attempt was made to go back from this custom " (page 357). There would be little danger in this suggestion, did not Mr. Cunningham proceed at once to build upon the possibility and find in it a key to the meaning of the revolt. " The difficulties of the manorial lords would be partially renewed with every subsequent visitation of the plague, and the pressure upon the villans to render actual service would become more severe until it at last resulted in the general outbreak."

The chief defect of this version of the circumstances is that it altogether fails to notice what is absolutely the most important fact among them, namely, that for some little while before the rising, villein tenants in many parts of the country on various pretexts refused to perform the services which they had been rendering hitherto, and even, as it would appear, to pay the customary rents. This strike on the part of the tenants is clearly indicated by the statute (1 Rich. II, c. 6) which Mr. Cunningham quotes ; and, if it is urged that the statute is untrustworthy, there is unimpeachable evidence in Wyclif's tractate *Of Servants*

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above, I have noticed a phrase in an act of 1554-55 which would seem to leave no possibility of doubt as to the survival of the craft guilds. Countrymen, it says, shall only be permitted to retail goods in corporate or market towns " when they shall be free of any the guilds and liberties of any the said cities, boroughs," etc. 1 and 2 P. and M. c. 7, § 3.

*and Lords.*<sup>1</sup> It is surely possible to recognize the hardships in the lot of the mediæval peasant, and yet to acknowledge that on this occasion he assumed the aggressive.

How much more important it is to get our facts right than our sympathies is illustrated by another passage in Mr. Cunningham's work. In dealing with 1381 Mr. Cunningham gives more than justice to the peasants; when he comes to the evictions of the sixteenth century he gives less than justice. For he remarks:

It seems not improbable that the lords had the peasantry entirely in their own power, and that, since they were technically liable for incidents of the nominal servitude into which they had returned since the failure in 1381, and *their lands were forfeited in law*, if not in equity. [Page 475.]

He refers for his authority to page 80 of the *Supplication of the Poor Commons* (Early English Text Society). But surely here Mr. Cunningham must have misread his notes; for what the passage says is that the new lords who had received grants of monastery lands tried to make the tenants believe that "by virtue of His Highness' sale all their former writings were void and of none effect." The passage has nothing whatever to do with any such non-fulfilment of obligations as Mr. Cunningham imagines.

One more criticism, this time as to the history of theory, and I have done. In his appendix, Mr. Cunningham reprints from Wolowski the whole of Oresme's treatise on money: and in a section devoted to the work (pages 320 *et seq.*) he praises it as "the first careful study of the reviving commercial life of Europe," and deems it especially "interesting as disputing the opinion attributed in the *opusculum* (*De Regimine Principum*) to Aquinas and showing that the prince has no right to make gain out of the coinage." Ever since Roscher discovered him, Oresme has had so insufferably virtuous a reputation as the first of mediæval writers who held "correct views" as to money, that sinful human nature could not support this last infliction of him, and he was looked up in Endemann. It was with a certain chuckling that Endemann's remarks were read, in his *Grundsätze*, page 75, and in the *Studien*, II, 188. There we are told that Oresme's "diatribe" is "neither a point of departure for later times, nor anything remarkable for his own." "All his propositions are derived from the jurists Azo and Accursius, the glossators and the commentators down to Bartolus and Baldus." "His ideas are essentially the same as those which Aquinas and many others after him had expressed." And Endemann sadly reflects that

<sup>1</sup> English Works, published by the Early English Text Society.

the joy of a scholar like Roscher over the supposed discovery of Oresme only shows how entirely ignorant he is of the importance for economics of the elder juristic literature, — a fact which must not lead us to reproach him, but at any rate shows how much remains to be done in this direction.

I cannot profess to know much of Azo and Baldus; but it is easy to consult the *De Regimine Principum*. Its teaching is not altogether clear, but the main point seems to be this: the writer recognizes that the right of coinage belongs legally to the sovereign, but warns him to be "moderatus" in diminishing either the weight or the quality of the metal, "quia hoc cedit in detrimentum populi." He quotes *Proverbs* to show that changes in weights and measures are displeasing to God; and refers to the celebrated reply of Pope Innocent to the king of Aragon, who "graviter reprehenditur" for debasing the currency. Considering the amount of attention Mr. Cunningham elsewhere gives to the teaching of Aquinas, the holy doctor might with reason lament that he was wounded in the house of his friend.

Looking back now on these various criticisms and on the book as a whole, it may perhaps be said that the chief drawback to the work is its failure to emphasize the idea of development — of evolution — both in institutions and in ideas. Mr. Cunningham may reply that there has been too much vague reference to development; and that economic change is too complex to be traced in clear lines or summed up in generalizations. This may be. But a comparison of English experience with that of the other countries of western Europe will probably show that in the general course of social history there are certain features common to them all; that these features are more important than those wherein the various countries differ; and that their growth and modification depend upon larger forces than the peculiarities of any one nation, king or thinker. Yet I cannot conclude this notice without once more saying that this first volume of Mr. Cunningham's is after all a remarkable achievement; that it is full of sound learning and suggestive thought; and that it is indispensable to all future students of English economic history.

W. J. ASHLEY.